National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
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For Release: ON RECEIPT
Photo Number: L 59-336
September 1995

MERCURY CAPSULE IN THE 30- by 60-FOOT TUNNEL

NASA technician checks the Mercury capsule prior to testing in the 30- by 60-Foot Tunnel in 1959 at Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va. Much of the research and development of the Mercury program was conducted at Langley. Langley was the home of NASA's Space Task Group until it moved to the newly established Johnson Space Center in 1962. The Mercury astronauts would return to Langley on a regular basis throughout the program to train on Langley's unique facilities.

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Built to test full-scale models or actual aircraft, the 30- by 60-Foot Tunnel was an innovative concept in wind tunnel design. It proved especially valuable during World War II as a majority of the nation's bombers and fighters (as well as several foreign aircraft) were tested in this tunnel. Since the 1970s, one of the unique test techniques used in the "30- by 60" was free-flight of dynamically scaled models in the test section. This technique allowed researchers to measure and assess flight characteristics as well as control options. The "30- by 60" is an example of a major facility adapted to serve a multitude of uses not originally visualized.

The "30 by 60" remained as one of NASA's largest wind tunnels until is closing in September 1995. In 1985 the 30-by 60-Foot Tunnel was designated a National Historic Landmark.

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